

Manager - Leader?

Management is about doing things right, leadership is about doing the right things??

There are many textbook definitions – if only it was that easy. In day to day operations it is much more complex. So, to bring better understanding to the matter we suggest you view leadership and management as the two ends of a continuum that calibrates performance.

Working from this premise, we can set up a rule of thumb for distinguishing where you are or what the current situation requires: If it is head down and focusing on getting the right job done to a set standard and on time – it is management. If it is head up and looking around, offering opinions on what needs to be done - you are in the leadership zone.

But like lots of the keys to understanding human behaviour, these 'definitions' have holes in them. We can all find easy exceptions and that's because human behaviour is complex. In all but exceptional circumstances each of us has the choice as to how we respond to our environment. This also means that at different times most of us can be either a manager – ensuring things are done correctly - or a leader – who brings the focus on to doing the right thing for the current circumstance.

So, digging deeper, what changes in behaviour do we observe when we move along the continuum from management to leadership?

Robert Hogan and Rodney Warrenfeltz have put together a useful matrix that defines the attributes of an effective leader. In this they identify four fundamental performance dimensions:

1. An effective leader has a good level of self knowledge and knows how to present him/herself, has good self esteem – a good intrapersonal understanding.
2. An effective leader has good social skills and can relate well to colleagues and friends – good interpersonal skills.
3. An effective leader has good business skills and can contribute effectively to the job in hand – is professionally/technically competent.
4. An effective leader has vision and ways of presenting this so that those around her/him willingly enrol in working to realise this.

This fourth dimension – where the leader draws on the talents of others and builds a team effort – is what most clearly distinguishes the leader from the manager. While the effective manager most likely scores well in the intrapersonal and interpersonal areas and has the technical skills that are in demand, the ability to move the team into new areas is not required and not evident. Add this fourth attribute and you are transforming a manager into a leader.

Can we learn to be an effective leader? Can we make the shift?

Hogan and Warrenfeltz are useful again here – they identify that as we move through life we also move sequentially through mastering the four dimensions.

In our childhood we build our self knowledge and grow our intrapersonal capability. In our adolescent years we confirm our broad interpersonal skill sets. As we move into the workforce and gain experience we build our technical knowledge and skills – and so set ourselves up to work effectively as managers.

However, for most of us it is not until adulthood that we perceive the need to grow our leadership capabilities.

But when each of us is ready we can learn the skills of leadership – and, so, increase our range of effective delivery on the performance continuum. We will each come to this at different times and through different opportunities – and some of us will start with inherent advantages (the ‘born leader’) – but we can all build our performance capability by developing our leadership skills.

If leadership is defined as ‘the actions and attitudes that create the will and the way for a group to achieve a common goal’ a good starting point for any budding leader is to focus on four key behaviours. It is our view that good leaders use these to succeed:

- They scan – and look beyond the task in hand to see what lies ahead
- They break set – and initiate new actions or provide different points of view.
- They draw out – and ask questions of those around them – to make full use of the talents in the team.
- They let go – and step back when they recognise that another person is best suited to take the lead.

If we view management and leadership as the ends on the performance continuum, our challenge is to build the skills needed to allow each of us to move back and forth along it as the work or organisational need requires. While the skills of leadership may be the hardest to master most of us are capable of doing so. A good management plan will help us build a full suite of performance competencies.

If we do things right we will most likely end up doing the right things.

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